Generating Resilience, Outcomes, and Wellness: Exploring the Role of School Counselors in Creating Trauma Sensitive Schools through a State-Wide Implementation Project

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Presenters

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Overview

• Project GROW overview
• GROW principles of implementation
• Exploring school counselor implementation experiences:
  1. Screening
  2. Reflective practice groups
  3. Teacher supports through “parallel process”
Everybody Has A Story?
Generating Resilience, Outcomes & Wellness

- Project GROW was a grant awarded by the New Hampshire DOE Office of Student Wellness
- Six schools throughout that include each region in the state
- Participants include 72 teachers, specialists, and administrators
- Conducting a 4-year effort to create trauma sensitive schools and to develop a model for the state
- Foundational knowledge: 20 core concepts of TSS
- Flexible implementation beginning with identifying current TSS activities and eliciting EVERYONE’S voice
We Need A Toolbox!!!

- “I would like increased strategies to help staff members who are struggling to understand trauma and the impact it has on students in our community.”

- “Being in the planning and development stage is hard but necessary.”
“Don’t just do something, stand there.”

(Jeree Pawl)
The Parallel Process of Change

- DOE OSW & BHI
- Learning Community Group
- District-Level Teams
- District Staff & Subgroups
- Classroom
- Relationships
  - Intra-personal
Project GROW Guiding Principles

- Reflective Practice
- Skills of Being
- TIC & Tribal Learning

Learning Community in Trauma-Sensitive Schools
Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Care (SAMSHA)

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment
- Voice and choice
- Resilience and strengths based
Welcome to Our Community

“When we interact with each other we trigger our brains to grow. Thus, we all participate in the shaping of each other’s brains” (Cozolino, p. 34).
“Professional learning communities tend serve to **two broad purposes**: (1) improving the **skills and knowledge** of educators through collaborative study, expertise exchange, and professional dialogue, and (2) improving the educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment of students through stronger leadership and teaching.”

Professional learning communities often function as a form of action research—i.e., as a way to continually question, reevaluate, refine, and improve teaching strategies and knowledge” (The Glossary of Educational Terms: http://edglossary.org/professional-learning-community/).
Community-Based Learning

- “...a group of individuals that are tied together by a shared time, familiarity, affection, and common purpose
- ...the social environments to which our brains adapted over countless generations
- ...individuals in it have a better chance surviving together than separately
- ...support [for it] often surpasses individual needs, which results in caretaking, self-sacrifice, and other forms of altruistic behavior.”

(Cozolino, L. (2014). Attachment-Based Teaching: Creating a Tribal Classroom. NY: W.W. Norton & Co.)
Are you fostering tribal instincts?
Creating A Community-Based Learning Experience

• Sharing power
• Cooperative leadership
• Developing a shared contract
• Co-constructing the learning experience
Predictability and availability

Stress reduction activities

Shared code of caring

A plan for resolving conflict & managing negative affect
Community Building

- Actual time to be together
- Subjective experiences with increasing emotional intensity
- Shared experiences and familiarity
- Opportunities for patterned social interaction
GROW Participant Reflections About the LC

• “Because of our learning community, I have become much more knowledgeable about what it means to be a trauma-informed system. In addition, the sharing of our Learning Community has provided me with more hope about our ability to support our most at-risk students. I truly believe that we are finally mobilized in NH to affect change at a broader level. There is a sense of cohesiveness and being together in this journey.”
GROW Participant Reflections About the LC

• “It is providing us with a wealth of ideas moving forward to create a TSS. It is great to have other collaborators who are working toward the same goal.”

• “People like the community and wish they could have even more time in it.”

• “I would like more face time with the community.”

• “It is an honor to be part of it. Wish we had more time to be together.”
Skills of Being: Reflective Capacity

- “Courage begins with showing up and letting ourselves be seen” (Brene Brown)

- “Vulnerability begets vulnerability; courage is contagious” (Brene Brown)

- “Who we are is more important than what we do.” (Jeree Pawl)
Reflective Thinking

Reflective practice means being curious about feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and how they impact our interactions with others

“...the ability to recognize there is more going on side a person than what we see by how she/he acts.”
Why Reflective Practice?
Why Reflective Practice in Education?

• It capitalizes on the latest brain science
• Minimizes bias
• Practice improvement - promote accountability and fidelity
• To be trauma-sensitive - help students to heal and learn
• Mitigate the impacts of vicarious trauma & prevent staff turnover
• Promotes reflective functioning in others & a more empathic community/society
Why Reflective Teaching

Reflective Practice in Education

Promotes Reflective Capacity

Self & Other Awareness

Creates Sensitive Interactions & Improve Attachment Security

Securely Attached Reflective Persons

Reflective Individuals Building Reflective Systems
Brain Growth

• **Neurogenesis** – the birth of new neurons

• **Neuroplasticity** – changing the structure & function of the brain

• Making new neural connections through reflection (making the implicit explicit)

• Intentionality and choice happen when we understand our reactions
Revisiting the Brain: How Brains Change

• Experiences change the brain
  ...by changing neural connections
• Experience with reflection allows us to think about feelings & reactions
Forms of Memory

Explicit memory
- Requires conscious awareness
  - Semantic memory: Facts and general knowledge
  - Episodic memory: Personally experienced events

Implicit memory
- Does not require conscious awareness
  - Procedural memory: Motor and cognitive skills
  - Priming: Enhanced identification of objects or words
  - Learning through classical conditioning
Making the Implicit Explicit: How it Happens

I AM HUNGRY
Reflection: The Key to Transformation

• Attachment experiences and implicit reactions can become explicit through repeated opportunities for reflection

• The more times we make connections between reactions and our previous experiences, the more control we have over them

• The things that are most difficult to look at cause us to AVOID
Reflective Practice

• The process of reflecting on reactions makes implicit memories explicit
• We can be intentional when we recognize the source of reactions
• Reflection is transcendence
  • ...it is the means by which we understand our past, regulate our emotions, maintain relationships, manage stress, and help others to heal
“We know from neuroscience that a structure in the brain called the **corpus callosum plays an important part in performance**. The corpus callosum is a thick band of nerve fibres that connects the left and right sides of the brain, **transferring information between the brain hemispheres**. It is true that the two hemispheres have locations involved with different functions i.e. within the left side of the brain a dominance in analytical thinking, language processing and drawing on existing knowledge to solve problems, while within the right side of the brain there is more of an association with intuition, creativity and understanding through metaphor and visualisation. However we shouldn't be thinking we are more left or right brained as we are all whole brained and need processing to occur in both hemispheres. **Reflective practice can help re-visit and strengthen neuronal connections we need to develop new habits/skills/mindsets within and between the two hemispheres.**”

The Science Behind Reflective Practice
Reflective Practice: An Educator’s Ethical Obligation

“Humans have evolved to be highly sensitive to others and there is no doubt that we have the ability to influence the inner states of those around us. As authority figures and surrogate parents, teachers have a direct line to the brains of our students. Because of this responsibility, we have to learn about our conscious and unconscious feelings because of their influence on our students and the culture of the classroom.” (Cozolino p. 137)
Reflective Process in the LC

• “I greatly enjoy learning from others. I love to hear ideas and imagine how they could be adapted for our environment. I reflect a lot on my own feelings and attitudes based off of the learning from the community.”

• “It has caused me to question our practices and protocols. I am learning to ask more questions and be more curious about how and why we do what we do.”
People Bring Themselves: What’s in Your Suitcase?

- People bring a past and a present to anything they do
  - Their schemas and beliefs
  - Their stigma beliefs
- Their social support systems
  - Positive support
  - Negative support
- Their history of trauma and illness
- Their families and close others
- Their economic situation
"The gold is in the shadows" (Siegel)
Educator Experiences
Emotion contagion leads to parallel experiences for others.
- Facilitated by mirror neurons.
- Can happen when we employ empathy.

"I know exactly how you feel."
Attunement & Emotion

Contagion

• The downside to emotional attunement...
  • We are susceptible to being infected by the negative feelings of others

• The upshot...
  • We have the power to impact the emotions of others

• Working with traumatized youth has an impact on caregivers such that they experience the same thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (parallel processes)
Parallel Processes (ARC, Blaustein)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Caregiver</th>
<th>Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>I am bad, unlovable, damaged.</td>
<td>I am ineffective</td>
<td>I am ineffective professional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can’t trust anyone.</td>
<td>This kid is rejecting me.</td>
<td>This family needs to work harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Shame, anger, fear, hopelessness.</td>
<td>Frustration, sadness, helplessness, worry.</td>
<td>Frustration, helplessness, indifference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cycle</td>
<td>She’s going to reject me anyway. I better not connect.</td>
<td>He’s just not interested in connecting with me.</td>
<td>I don’t think anyone could make a difference with this family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ITS NOT ABOUT ME

Parallel Process
GROW Implementation Principles:
The Power of “Parallel Process”

• “Creating a partnership with building administration has been helpful. Understanding that this is a learning process for EVERYONE and being sensitive that ALL school personnel need training.”
A Common Myth

I can separate myself and my work.
Have you made specific changes to your practices as a result of participation in the GROW Learning Community?

25 responses

- **Yes**: 76%
- **No**: 16%
- **I am looking forward to these changes but I believe that we are still in the planning changes. There has been more discussion about the topic and it...**
- **We have created goals within our TCT and trainings have happened for our administration team; which is one of our domain focuses.**
Childhood Screening For Transferring Families

Anne Hollister Barach, MEd
Mission

• To welcome and care for our new school families.
• Families in our school have changed significantly in the last 10 years. The Child & Family Experiences survey is an intervention we have put in place to better understand the needs of our families.
Challenges

- Time and money
- No solid process in place
- Supporting internalizers
- Follow-up with families
- There are no easy fixes
Lifesavers

• Invested key stakeholders
• School-wide focus on teach professional development
• The power of relationships
Reflections

“There is a voice that doesn’t use words. Listen.”
(Rumi)
Conducting Reflective Practice Groups for Staff Development: A School Counselor’s Experience

Kaitlin Gallagher, M.Ed.
Mill Brook Elementary School
Concord, NH
Why Reflective Practice?

• Some of our students we were feeling a sense of hopelessness, emotionally fatigued, or inability to genuinely connect with them.

• Many of our Educational Assistants that work with our toughest student population were putting in 110% and students were not giving anything back in return.

• In one particular student-focused meeting, staff broke down in regards to this student. They were given “permission” to vent during this meeting. This lent the opportunity for staff to have a safe environment to express themselves and feel validated. This meeting out of all the ones held that school year proved to be the most powerful and staff left feeling a sense of comradery in a different way.
Our Mission with Reflective Practice

• Our hope with Reflective Practice is that all staff members have a safe environment with other staff members to feel empowered to express their challenges, feel free of judgment and recommendations.

• Ultimately staff will build an ongoing self-reflection practice in their daily work.

• As we continue to work with challenging students, Reflective Practice is an empowering tool for self-care and our ability to manage conflicts to continue to nurture the success of our students.
Logistics: Organization of Reflective Practice Groups

• School Counselor Facilitator
• Organized groups based on the “Inventory of Practices”
• 6-8 staff members per a group (all staff; pre-K to 2nd grade)
• School Counselor meets with GROW consultant to organize the focus topics/activities for group reflective practice meetings
• Working with administration to schedule meeting time and student coverage
• Groups meet once a month
• Delayed classroom start - students have an extended morning recess
• Send out the agenda and reminders in advance for groups to prepare
GROW Inventory of Practices

- Student Relationships
- Peer Relationships
- Knowledge About Trauma
- Trauma-Sensitive Responding
- Instructional Approaches & Classroom Structure
Challenges

• Staff members understanding and feeling the value of Reflective Practice.
• Not just one more “thing” added to their plate.
• Staff remembering to meet and take the time seriously.
• Time allotment. Often times the group time ends abruptly and members get cut off.
• Having everyone heard each time.
• They want to have a “leader” for the group.
• Not hearing honest feedback
Managing the Push Back

• My own reflection, that not everyone is passionate about this practice
• Encouraging and reminding others to be patient with the process
• Frustration with staff questions and complaints, staff unpreparedness
• Support from administration has been key to continue on with this process
Reflecting on Parallel Process

Doug Bonnema, M.A.
Bow Elementary School
Bow, NH
Mission

• A small group of us wanted to empower teachers to use TSS principles and SEL as part of their daily practice.

• Draw on the parallel process from GROW project, i.e. give to teachers what they need to be able to give their students (authenticity, empathy, psychological safety, attunement, collaborative problem solving, etc.).
But 1st... Reflective Practice in Action

• Talking and reflecting about the systemic impact of trauma on school culture and staff relationships and how reflection on these negative parallel processes can shield us from these impacts.
What We Learned

• When you are asking educators to build a learning community that promotes taking care of one another, that takes the time to acknowledge and process emotions, that has & rehearses plans for everyone to connect, resolve conflict, disagree politely, and that provides regular, frequent opportunities for Social Emotional Learning.

• Teachers, all staff, will need the same to be able considering changing their practice and, for those who already have such a practice, to be able to sustain it.

• But we learned that the hard way
What We Are Starting to Learn About Ourselves

• When a school under a lot of stress comes into contact with trauma, parallel process can lead any of us to bring feelings, reactions, and implicit memories into difficult situations that really have very little to do with the actual situation and, as a result, cause is to behave in ways that undermine trust, relationships, and collaboration

• It is crucial to be cognizant of negative forms of parallel process so you can take preventative and protective measures

• We need to continually reflect on the quality of our relationships, our reactions to one another

• We need to be wary of and interrogate things like blame, self-righteousness, us vs. them thinking, impatience for change in systems or individuals, and when we feel like acting punitively

• Without reflection all of us are much more likely to get stuck in shallow, fear-based thinking (complexities get lost) and emotional reactivity
Challenges

• This type of reflecting feels very vulnerable
• So we need to continue to rebuild trust & relationships
• Creating time & space & buy-in for reflection
Reflections On My Role

• Startling how much weaker my self-regulation was with staff--much more effort required than with students or families

• When in crisis mode so often, begin to see people as what they can do for you or a to do item to check off; at least as important to bring full presence, to fully see staff

• Working from TSS lens as a paradigm shift is unsettling in that in some ways it can be like starting at the beginning of your career--even when you “know what to do” you don’t have the experience doing it
You can't get to COURAGE without walking through VULNERABILITY.
- Brené Brown -

Lifesavers

- We began to recognize when one another in a more fear-based frame of mind so we could use a “failsafe”: if you see me acting in a reactive way, please pull me aside
- Providing PD around vicarious trauma, self-care, & self-compassion
- Asking before venting (because of emotional contagion)
- Practicing gratitude (especially for staff and how they positively impact students)
- Power of being vulnerable
Thank You!

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